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ABSTRACT

In most European languages, choice of address form classifies the relation between speakers. The first theoretical framework for analyzing address form usage was established by Brown and Gilman (1960) in their investigation of the semantics of pronoun use in a wide variety of Indo-European languages, which concluded that Europeans use the informal pronoun with increasing frequency. This appears to be true of Swedish, in which greater avoidance of second person personal pronouns is practiced than in other European languages. The problem of choosing an appropriate term in Swedish has been complicated by a feeling that the grammatically correct use of the second person plural to a single individual was impolite. One was expected to use other forms. Recently, however, this practice has changed towards a more general use of the informal pronoun, due partly to a number of political and social pressures. This paper discusses both aspects of Swedish address form usage: the diachronic, with emphasis on social and political factors which have produced considerable change in the system during this century, and the synchronic, focusing on age and formality as possible factors in form choice. (Author/CLK)

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Tradition and Change in Swedish Address Forms[1]

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When we speak to others, we have the ability to convey information in a number of different ways, including the words we choose in addressing the other person. By saying either "Miss" or "Ms.", "John" or "Mr. so-and-so", we reveal information both about our attitudes and about the relationship between ourselves and the person being addressed. The most common device in European languages for expressing either intimate and informal relationships or distant and formal relationships is the choice between the informal and formal second person singular pronoun. Address form usage has been studied in many different languages (Japanese- Befu and Norbeck 1958; American English- Brown and Ford 1964; Nuer- Evans- Pritchard 1964; Canadian French- Lambert 1969; German- Silverberg 1940), but the most comprehensive study to date is the Brown and Gilman (1960) research on pronoun usage in a wide variety of European languages. In their article, Brown and Gilman demonstrate that the choice of address forms depends on two key factors: 1) the "solidarity-semantic", that is, those relationships which are symmetrical, and 2) the "power-semantic", that is, those relationships which are asymmetrical. Brown and Gilman also find that there is an increasing tendency among Europeans to use the informal pronoun under most circumstances.

This same movement towards the informal pronoun appears to be true of Swedish, in which greater avoidance of second person singular pronouns has traditionally been practiced than in any other European language, including the closely related languages of Danish and Norwegian. Decision-making in choosing address forms (tilltalsord) is unique in Swedish, because while the informal pronoun du has long been the standard address form among friends and certain family members, the formal pronoun ni, which is also the second person plural pronoun, has only recently become acceptable as a polite form of address to a single individual. For many years, three possibilities existed in "polite" address: 1) using du in an intimate relationship, 2) using the title of an unknown, or less well-known, individual, or 3) using the passive construction, thereby avoiding making any choice at all. These norms were especially true in urban situations and in situations involving the upper-classes; du has traditionally been considered the proper form of address to everyone in most rural areas and in certain dialects.

In this paper, I will present some of the major developments in address form usage in Swedish and follow this diachronic outline with some brief observations about the factors involved in deciding what constitutes a proper form of address to a given individual.

Our earliest records, the Old Norse sagas, indicate that du was originally the accepted form of address to every individual, king or peasant.[2] At some time during the 13th century however, the second person plural, I, possibly under German influence (Tegnér 1889:305), began to be used as the polite form of address to the king, and later to the nobility.

During the following centuries, I changed to ni due to a "fusion" (sammansmältning) with the last letter of the second person verb suffix, -n. The status of ni was exactly opposite the position of the earlier I; by the 18th century, ni was typically used by persons of high status to their social inferiors. Incorrect use of ni by a person of low status to a person of high status even resulted in court action in some cases (see Linder 1884:12-13). This unusual position of what should have been the polite and formal pronoun persisted well into the 1800's--ni was considered the proper formal or distant tilltalsord only when given by a speaker of relatively high status to an addressee of low status. Speakers of relatively low status were expected to address those above them by using their titles.

The complex rules for address form usage were defined in the following way in the 1836 Grammar Book of the Swedish Academy (Svenska Akademiens Språklära):

> In conversation Ni is used instead of Du...only when speaking to a less well-known person, or one of humbler condition than the speaker. Likewise, He (Han), She (Hon) are at times used in conversation to an inferior person, which indicates a little more respect than Ni and less familiarity than Du. (quoted in Wessén 1965: 219)[3]

In the mid-1800's the problems presented by this complex system began to receive attention. Movements and reforms were organized in the attempt to establish a generally acceptable formal address form. A lively debate raged in Sweden during much of the 19th century, with various scholars rejecting and supporting the idea of accepting ni as the general polite form

of address (e.g., De Geer 1844, Frigell 1848, Sondén 1865, Linder 1884).

At the same time, other movements attempting to generate alternate simple forms of polite address were underway. In the 1870's the fröken-reform, or "Miss-reform", took place (Linder 1882:63). This reform allowed the term "Miss" to be used as a general social title to all young women, rather than restricting its use to women of the higher classes, as had been true before. Other general social titles, such as herrn, "the master", and damen, "the lady", also grew in popularity, since they too allowed the speaker to address an unknown individual politely.

Ni, on the other hand, remained unpopular as a general address form in many circles and titles continued to be considered the polite form of address. It is with respect to this situation that Tegnér in 1880 laments that "...we even find herr generalkrigskommisarien a more comfortable word to articulate than ni..." (Tegnér 1880:87)[4]. The resistance to accepting ni was undoubtedly based on its traditional status as an address form from a speaker of the higher classes to an addressee of low status, but many other reasons were given. Some authors based their criticism on phonemic symbolism and claimed that Swedish words which begin in n- usually denote unpleasant or hostile ideas. It was said that ni sounded "sharp" and that it had "a chilly and ironic ring" (see Wellander 1932.205)[5]. Other opponents of ni stated flatly that ni had "a tinge of condescension" about it (see Wellander 1932:205)[6].

Despite these objections however, ni gained acceptance in such large numbers during the early 1900's, that Wellander was able to write in his 1939 grammar book, "In wide circles of the Swedish people the use of ni is experiencing a powerful advance" (Wellander 1939:143)[7].

An important element in the changing pattern of address form usage is the Social Democratic party and its policy on address. In the 1920's, the Social Democrats decided that a party which advocates egalitarianism should not use address norms which are the inheritance from, and the reflection of, a highly stratified society. Consequently, it became party policy for all Social Democrats to use du with one another. Inasmuch as the Social Democrats have dominated Swedish politics since the early '30's, the influence of this policy may have helped liberalize attitudes in Sweden about address forms.

In 1968, this "liberalization" process was radicalized when Bror Rexed, director of the Social Welfare Board (Socialstyrelsen), initiated the du-reform, in which all medical and welfare personnel were instructed to use du with the public and to expect to receive du in return. Unpopular as one would think such a policy would be within the context of the traditional norms of address, the du-reform is apparently gaining acceptance on a large scale, with a corresponding impact on the older patterns of address form usage. The precise status of the address forms is difficult to gauge, because different generations of Swedish speakers, due to the rapid changes that have taken place in this century, have different ideas about what constitutes an appropriate form of address. Contemporary address norms are thus considerably different from their counterparts at the beginning of this century.

Before examining the factors involved in decision-making, the role of the passive should be discussed. In order to avoid a choice between the various tilltalsord, Swedish speakers often take advantage of the passive construction, which allows the speaker to evade all forms of address. Through the passive, the simple question "Are you leaving Sunday?" becomes "Will there be a journey on Sunday?" (Skall det bli resa på sondag?) and "Do you use sugar?" is phrased "Is sugar used" (Används socker?). There is an interesting correlation between the use of the "s-passive" and avoidance of address forms. Gösta Holm (1967) points out that the "s-passive" occurs more frequently in Standard Swedish than in dialects, and posits that this situation is the result of the influence of the written language, which uses the "s-passive" extensively, on Standard Swedish. I would suggest that the frequent occurence of the "s-passive" in Standard Swedish can also be explained in part by the avoidance of tilltalsord in Standard Swedish. In the dialects, where du has been an accepted form of address, the "s-passive" would be less useful. On the other hand, the "s-passive" would occur more frequently in Standard Swedish, where there is the need to construct personal statements and questions, while at the same time avoiding address forms.

In analyzing the current situation of Swedish address forms, it seems to me that two major changes have taken place. First, there has been a

movement in the acceptability of the actual forms of address towards a wider use of both the informal and formal pronouns under certain circumstances. Second, it seems that the factors involved in deciding which term to use to whom have changed as well. Address forms were primarily based on social class until this century--certain types of behavior and address were "class-bound". Elements of this system are still very much in evidence, but they no longer play the dominant role in decision-making. For relationships which do not already have an established form of address, the factor which appears to over-ride all other considerations at the present time is the question of social context--is the situation formal or informal?

While working with a small number of informants in this country, it became apparent to me that the following factors, given in decreasing order of importance, are the key elements in deciding what terms of address are appropriate for certain kinds of addressees: 1) the formality of the situation, 2) the age of the addressee, 3) the social status of the addressee, and 4) the power or influence of the addressee. What this system suggests is that rather than being based on social gradation as previously was the case, contemporary address norms in Swedish function as a register.

Age follows social situation as the second most important consideration, because "polite" address requires agreement as to what constitutes proper behavior. Age is thus important in two respects: 1) the age of the addressee vis á vis the speaker, and 2) the absolute age of the addressee. A person born in 1910 will have very different ideas about what represents polite address than will a person born in 1950. The social status and power of the addressee remain important considerations, but, with some exceptions, these factors appear to be less critical than either social situation or age.

By following the lead Michael Agar (1975) and others have given in analyzing decision-making, I have arranged the four factors of situation, age, status, and power into the sixteen possible combinations. (See handout) The chart assumes that a high degree of each factor is either present or not present. Naturally there are intermediate variations, but these have not been included for the sake of simplicity.

In the four most formal situations (cases 1-4), where the situation is very formal and the age of the addressee very high, it seems fairly clear that most Swedish speakers would at least initially use the title of the addressee. In the four least formal cases (13-16), most speakers would clearly use the informal du. There are several mid-range situations, where most speakers would be inclined to use polite forms of address. However, it is in the other situations, where the addressee is old and the situation is informal, or conversely, the situation is formal, while the addressee is not so old, that I suggest the passive is most often used. It is in these "marginal" situations that a commitment towards either formality on the one hand or informality on the other is most likely to be awkward or embarrassing.

Certainly there are some exceptions to this observation. For instance, military officers are addressed to this day by their titles under most circumstances. Likewise, employers present certain problems; even those informants who would say du to every other category of person, said that they would avoid using any address form to an employer. Similarly, special personalities present special problems. Special consideration must also be given to those speakers, who, for ideological reasons, might be inclined to use either very formal or very informal address forms.

As I have tried to outline, address form usage in Swedish has changed considerably during the last two hundred years, both in terms of fundamental rules for behavior and in terms of the manifestations of these rules. Political and social pressure have joined together in working for a generally acceptable form of address; these efforts have met with a great deal of success. Du can now be said without necessarily implying an intimate relationship; ni can now be used without "a shade of condescension"; titles are no longer the necessary form of address to the upper classes. Tilltalsord, formerly class-bound, have become increasingly situation-bound, and as such function as elements of a register, rather than as a system reflecting the social hierarchy. In this way, Swedish appears to be over-coming the gap between extremely distant and extremely intimate address forms.

Notes

[1]This paper presents preliminary approaches to and theories about the Swedish address form system which are being considered in preparation for fieldwork during the summer of 1975.

[2]For instance, the lawman Þorgnýr uses the informal þu (possessive accusative singular þína) to King Óláf in the following excerpt from Heimskingla:

> "Nú er þat vili várr boandanna, at þú gerir sætt við Óláf digra, Nóregskonung, ok giptir honum dottur þína Ingigerði." (Jónsson 1911:242).

[3]Swedish original:

> "I umgänget nyttjas Ni, i stället för Du...endast vid tilltal till mindre bekanta personer och af ringare stånd än den talande. Likaså brukas stundom i umgängestal Han, Hon till en ringare person, hvilket utmärker litet mer höflighet än Ni och mindre förtrolighet än Du."

[4]Swedish original:

> "...vi till och med...finna herr generalkrigskommisarien vara ett bekvämare ord att uttala än ni..."

[5]Swedish original:

> "skarpt"; "en kyllig och ironisk klang"

[6]Swedish original:

> "en bismack av neglåtenhet"

[7]Swedish original:

> "Inom vida kretsar av det svenska folket är bruket av ni statt i kraftig frammarsch."

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Swedish address forms: possible combinations

	A	B	C	D	Probable address form:
1.	+	+	+	+	Title
2.	+	+	+	-	Title
3.	+	+	-	+	Title
4.	+	+	-	-	Title
5.	+	-	+	+	title? tilltalsord?
6.	+	-	+	-	title? tilltalsord?
7.	+	-	-	+	?
8.	+	-	-	-	?
9.	-	+	+	+	title? tilltalsord?
10.	-	+	+	-	title? tilltalsord?
11.	-	+	-	+	?
12.	-	+	-	-	?
13.	-	-	+	+	du
14.	-	-	+	-	du
15.	-	-	-	+	du
16.	-	-	-	-	du

A: very formal social situation
B: high age of addressee
C: high social status of addressee
D: great power or influence of addressee

+: indicates presence of factor
-: indicates absence of factor